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ABSTRACT

The interrelationships among young adults' levels of moral reasoning, their preferred discipline style, and how they reason with children on moral issues was investigated. After initial screening, 25 males and 25 females completed a test on defining issues of moral judgement. Then 20 subjects were classified at the high principled level, and 30 at the low principled level. Then all subjects were shown filmstrips with moral dilemmas involving children. Individuals at the principled level of moral reasoning were found to prefer using induction and perceived their mothers as having used more induction than power assertion. Conventional level subjects preferred using power assertion and perceived their mothers as having used more power assertion than induction. Subjects used moral reasoning at levels below their own level of reasoning when explaining to children the importance of keeping promises, telling the truth, and obeying adults. Principled adults used conventional level reasoning, while conventional and preconventional level adults used preconventional level moral reasoning. These data were supportive of previous research and theory on moral internalization processes and were discussed in relation to previous studies on parental discipline styles, family patterns of moral reasoning and children's moral development. (Author/BMW)

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Moral Development: How Adults Reason With Children

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Adults' Moral Reasoning with Children

Hoffman (1970; 1975) and Kohlberg (1969; 1976) have stimulated much interest, research, and controversy regarding moral development with their contrasting socialization and cognitive-developmental theories respectively. Hoffman (1975) has argued that parental use of induction is the critical determinant of moral internalization, while Kohlberg (1976) has argued that moral internalization results from exposure to higher levels of moral reasoning. Inductive discipline techniques have been found to be associated with advanced moral development in children (Hoffman, 1970, 1975, 1977; Saltzstein, 1976); however, there has been little evidence that children are normally exposed to progressively increasing levels of moral reasoning. Although the socialization and cognitive-developmental positions are different, there is some commonality and potential for integration. According to Hoffman (1977), "Induction includes techniques in which the parent gives explanations or reasons for requiring the child to change his behavior, or directly appeals to conformity-inducing agents that may already exist within the child." (p. 88). Kohlberg's (1976) cognitive-developmental theory suggests that there are six different stages or kinds of moral reasoning that could be used by individuals. It is interesting to note that parental use of induction focuses on the concern for others (rather than self) which is similar to stage 3 in Kohlberg's hierarchy of stages, while power assertion techniques are similar to stage 1 moral reasoning. Therefore, although induction may be a major determinant of moral internalization, there may be several different forms of induction or reasoning which parallel Kohlberg's model.

Research on the socialization of moral development has been limited primarily to correlational studies of parental discipline styles and children's moral development (Gutkin, 1975; Hoffman, 1970, 1975; Montemayor, Note 1; Saltzstein, 1976) and to correlational studies of parents' moral reasoning levels and their children's levels of moral reasoning (Denney & Duffy, 1974; Haan, Langer, & Kohlberg, 1976; Holstein, 1973; Hudgins & Prentice, 1973; Jurkovic & Prentice, 1974). Gutkin (1975) found that mothers reporting greater use of punishment had children who focused more on consequences (damage) rather than intentionality when making moral judgments. More recently, Montemayor (Note 1) reported that children with person oriented mothers used intentionality rather than consequences when making moral judgments; while children with position oriented mothers focused more on consequences rather than intentionality. In general, these studies combined with studies on parental use of induction (Hoffman, 1977) suggest that parental socialization styles are related to the development of children's moral judgments.

Although researchers studying the relationship between parents' and their children's level of moral reasoning have found positive relationships, the relationships have not always been strong nor consistent and causality could not be determined from the data. Denney and Duffy (1974) reported a positive relationship ($r = .51$ with age partialled out) between the mothers' implied level of moral reasoning and the children's level of moral reasoning. Positive relations were also found between parents' and younger sons' moral stages, but not between parents' and daughters' moral stages (Haan, Langer, & Kohlberg, 1976). The positive relationship, however,

did not endure with older sons. In studies involving delinquents and their mothers, Hudgins and Prentice (1973) found that mothers of both delinquents and nondelinquents used a higher level of moral reasoning than their sons, and that mothers of delinquents used lower stages (2 and 3) than nondelinquents' mothers. In addition, Jurkovic and Prentice (1974) found that mothers whose sons were at the preconventional level exhibited greater dominance and hostility during their moral interactions. Holstein (1973) has reported that principled level parents had more conventional level children than conventional level parents. She also found that principled parents were more likely to encourage their child's participation in decision making over moral issues, and that they spent more time when discussing moral issues with their children. Therefore, while these studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between parents' and childrens' levels of moral reasoning, they have not, however, established the processes involved in children's attaining higher levels of moral reasoning. How exactly do parents accomplish upward movement in their child's moral reasoning? Do adults reason with children at the principled, conventional, or preconventional level of moral reasoning?

The purpose of the present study was to better understand the processes involved in moral internalization. Therefore, the interrelationships between discipline styles, levels of moral reasoning, and how adults actually reason with children were studied. Among the questions investigated were: Are there differences among adults in their reasoning with children? Do principled level adults differ from conventional level adults in their reasoning with children? and Is there a relationship between level of moral reasoning and discipline style?

Hoffman (1977) has demonstrated that parental use of induction is associated with an advanced moral orientation characterized by independence from external sanctions and high guilt, and that power assertive discipline techniques are associated with a moral orientation based on fear of external detection and punishment. Therefore, it was expected that adults at the principled level of moral reasoning (stages 5 or 6) would prefer to use induction discipline techniques rather than power assertion, while adults at stages less than the principled level would prefer power assertion techniques. In addition, based on the socialization processes involved, it was expected that individuals at the principled level of moral reasoning would perceive their mothers as having preferred using induction rather than power assertion, while individuals at lower levels of moral reasoning would perceive their mothers as having preferred using power assertion or love withdrawal rather than induction.

Previous research on children's moral development has not addressed the question of how adults explain issues (e.g., telling the truth, keeping promises, obeying adults) to children. Research on communication patterns (Flavell, Botkin, Fry, Wright, & Jarvis, 1968; Rubin & Brown, 1975) suggests that adults and even older children modify their speech when addressing children. In addition, considerable research on language development in children (see Snow & Ferguson, 1977) has found that when adults talk to children they simplify their language, and to some extent, take into account children's special linguistic and cognitive states (Gleason, 1977). According to Gleason (1977), "As children grow older, the speech directed to them becomes more complex in every sense of the word." (p. 204). Based on these findings, it was expected that adults would simplify their

moral reasoning when explaining moral issues to children and that they would use reasoning at levels below their own level of moral reasoning.

Methods

Subjects

Initially 150 college students (70 males and 80 females) between 18 and 21 years of age and enrolled in introductory psychology volunteered to participate in the study. After completing the Defining Issues Test (Rest, Note 2), 50 subjects (25 males and 25 females) were selected for further participation on the basis of their P-scores.

Procedure

All subjects were asked to complete the Defining Issues Test (DIT) of moral judgment. Using the scoring procedure suggested by Rest (Note 2), both stage and P-scores were determined for each subject. For further interviewing, 20 subjects (10 males and 10 females) with stage scores of either 5 or 6 and P-scores greater than 47.5 (high principled level) were selected. In addition, 30 subjects (15 males and 15 females) with stage scores of 2, 3, or 4 and P-scores less than 40.0 (low principled level) were selected for further participation.

Each of these subjects was then shown two filmstrips with moral dilemmas involving children (Selman & Kohlberg, 1972) and were individually interviewed by a female experimenter. The two filmstrips shown were: Holly's story, which involves keeping promises; and the Captain story, which involves telling the truth and obedience to authority. After watching each filmstrip, the subjects were asked a series of questions regarding the dilemma involved and how they would explain various concepts

and issues to children (e.g., "How would you explain to children why obeying adults is important?"). After completing the interview, each subject was asked to complete the discipline style measure previously used by Hoffman and Saltzstein (1967). Two scenarios with children talking back and not doing what they are told were presented with several alternative responses which reflected power assertion, love withdrawal and induction styles of discipline (see Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967). Each subject indicated whether they would (usually, sometimes, rarely, or never) use each of the suggested alternatives, and ranked their three most preferred responses. In addition, subjects indicated how their mothers would have responded in the situations. The three ranked responses were weighted to determine the preferred style of discipline. The interviews took approximately one hour for each subject, and the interviewer was unaware of the subject's level of moral reasoning.

Results

The mean P-score for high principled subjects ($\underline{M}$ = 56.4) was significantly different from the mean P-score for low principled subjects ($\underline{M}$ = 27.0), $t(48) = 21.60$, $p < .001$. There were no significant sex differences in P-scores. Among the high principled subjects, 17 were at stage 5, and three were at stage 6. Among the low principled subjects, 13 were at stage 4, 12 were at stage 3, and five were at stage 2.

Responses to the interviews were scored by two independent raters who used a scoring procedure developed from responses obtained in earlier research. Basically, the responses to the questions involving how subjects would explain keeping promises, telling the truth, and obeying adults to children were categorized into the first four stages of moral reasoning

described by Kohlberg (1976). For example, stage 1 responses focused on punishment and obedience to adults' authority (e.g., "Give examples of what happens by not obeying, such as punishment." or "Adults usually know what's better for them."). Stage 2 responses emphasized reciprocity and self-interest (e.g., "Obey in order to keep from getting hurt." or "You'll want children to obey you when you are older."). Stage 3 responses focused on doing things to be liked by others (e.g., "Adults will not like you if you disobey."), while stage 4 responses centered on fixed rules or normative obligations to others (e.g., "Obeying adults is setting the format for their lives and living in harmony with laws, rules, and regulations."). No principled level responses (i.e., Stages 5 or 6) were offered by the subjects to the children. There was 90% agreement between the two raters for classifying subjects as using preconventional (stages 1 and 2) or conventional (stages 3 and 4) level reasoning with children. A third rater was used to resolve the few discrepancies in classification of the responses.

Subjects' level of moral reasoning with children was significantly related to their level of moral development $\chi^2(1) = 22.21$, $p < .001$ (see Table 1). High principled level individuals used more conventional level reasoning (stages 3 and 4) with children, while low principled subjects were more likely to use preconventional reasoning (stages 1 and 2) when explaining to children the importance of keeping promises, telling the truth, and obeying adults. As can be seen in Table 1, these results

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Insert Table 1 here

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were consistent for both males and females. It is interesting to note that all five stage 2 subjects used preconventional reasoning exclusively.

Subjects' discipline style scores were analyzed by a 2 (moral reasoning level) X 2 (sex of subject) X 3 (discipline style) unweighted means ANOVA with repeated measures. The mean discipline style scores for high and low principled subjects are presented in Table 2. The responses from two low

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Insert Table 2 here

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principled subjects could not be used because of incomplete protocols, There were no significant main or interaction effects involving sex of subject. There was a significant effect for discipline style ($F(2,88) = 5.02$, $p < .01$ and a significant interaction involving subjects' level of moral reasoning and discipline style, $F(2,88) = 6.62$, $p < .01$. Tukey's test for individual comparisons indicated ($p < .01$) that subjects preferred to use power assertion ($\underline{M} = 4.52$) and induction ($\underline{M} = 4.00$) rather than love withdrawal ($\underline{M} = 2.56$) as their discipline style. Furthermore, low principled subjects indicated a greater preference for using power assertion ($\underline{M} = 5.55$) than high principled subjects ($\underline{M} = 3.15$), while high principled subjects indicated a greater preference for using induction ($\underline{M} = 5.25$) than low principled subjects ($\underline{M} = 3.05$). High principled subjects preferred to use induction rather than power assertion, while low principled subjects preferred to use power-assertion rather than induction. These comparisons of means were significantly different ($p < .01$). There were no significant differences between low and high principled subjects for using love withdrawal techniques.

Similar analyses were performed on the subjects' perceptions of how their mothers would respond on the discipline style measure. There was a

significant effect for discipline style, $F(2,88) = 5.34$, $p < .01$, and a significant discipline style by subjects' level of moral reasoning interaction $F(2,88) = 6.84$, $p < .01$. Consistent with subjects' own responses, their perceptions of their mothers' discipline style emphasized ($p < .01$) power assertion ($\underline{M} = 4.37$) and induction ($\underline{M} = 4.15$) rather than love withdrawal ($\underline{M} = 2.37$). Further tests of individual comparisons indicated significant differences ($p < .01$), as low principled subjects perceived their mothers as having used more power assertion ($\underline{M} = 5.25$) than induction ($\underline{M} = 3.46$), while high principled subjects perceived their mothers as having used more induction ($\underline{M} = 5.10$) than power assertion ($\underline{M} = 3.20$). Furthermore, low principled subjects perceived their mothers as having used more power assertion than mothers of high principled subjects, while high principled subjects perceived their mothers as having used more induction than mothers of low principled subjects. There were no significant differences on the perceived use of love withdrawal by mothers of high and low principled subjects. The relationship between the subjects' own discipline style and their perception of their mothers' discipline style was positively related, however the correlations were small: power assertion ($r = .17$); induction ($r = .13$), and love withdrawal ($r = .33$). Only the final relationship was significant ($p < .05$). Therefore, subjects apparently responded to the measure from different perspectives (i.e., self and mother's) rather than simply responding both times from their own perspective.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the interrelationships among levels of moral reasoning, discipline styles, and how adults

reason with children in order to provide a better understanding of the processes involved in moral internalization. The results are supportive of both previous research and theory on moral internalization, and extend the results of previous findings by demonstrating a relationship between Hoffman's discipline styles and Kohlberg's levels of moral reasoning. In addition, the data provide an initial step in attempting to clarify how adults reason with children on moral issues and suggest that not only are there differences among adults in how they reason with children but also that their level of moral reasoning with children is related to their own level of moral reasoning.

The results are supportive of Hoffman's (1977) position regarding a positive relationship between induction and advanced moral development as induction was the preferred discipline style used by principled level individuals. Previously Hoffman (1977) reported that parental discipline was affected by both personality (i.e., authoritarianism) and life circumstances (i.e., father absence). The present data suggest that discipline style is also related to another individual difference variable, level of moral reasoning. Furthermore, these data support the socialization process explanation for moral development as the principled level subjects perceived their mothers as more likely using induction rather than either power assertion or love withdrawal, while conventional level subjects perceived their mothers as having preferred using more power assertion. Another perspective on these data is that mothers who were perceived as having used more power assertion had children who, as young adults, were more likely to be at the conventional rather than principled level of moral reasoning, while mothers who were perceived as having used more induction had children

who, as young adults, were more likely to be at the principled level of moral reasoning.

Previously Gutkin (1975) found that mothers who used more power assertion had children who focused on consequences rather than intentionality when making moral judgments. In the present study, subjects who perceived their mothers as having preferred the use of power assertion were at lower levels of moral reasoning and reasoned with children at the preconventional level of moral reasoning. Therefore it is apparent that power assertive techniques are associated with lower levels of moral reasoning.

Previous studies on communication patterns (Flavell, Botkin, Fry, Wright, & Jarvis, 1968; Rubin & Brown, 1975) and how adults talk to children (e.g., Gleason, 1977; Snow & Ferguson, 1977) found that adults modified their speech by simplifying their language when interacting with children. As expected, the adults in the present study simplified their level of moral reasoning when explaining concepts to children. One possible explanation why adults used lower leveled moral reasoning with children might be due to the nature of the moral issues used in the present study. Moral dilemmas children experience may require lower levels of moral reasoning to resolve than moral issues faced by adults. This explanation, however, could not be tested in the present study. The most interesting finding in these data was that subjects did not simply use moral reasoning at the lowest level but rather used reasoning at one level below their own level of moral reasoning. Conventional level subjects used preconventional reasoning while principled subjects used conventional level reasoning. One possible reason why this occurred may be related to the

finding that principled reasoning adults preferred using an inductive discipline style while conventional level adults preferred power assertive discipline styles. Principled adults may prefer to use conventional level reasoning with children because conventional level reasoning (e.g., Stage 3) is similar to induction which focuses on the consequences for others rather than self. Similarly, conventional subjects may prefer preconventional reasoning with children because preconventional reasoning (stages 1 and 2) is similar to power assertion which is clearly associated with a morality based on the fear of punishment and consequences to self rather than concern for others. Also, consistent with the cognitive-developmental position (Kohlberg, 1976), the five preconventional level subjects only used reasoning at their own preconventional level and did not produce reasoning at any higher levels.

Although a few previous studies (e.g., Denney & Duffy, 1974; Haan, Langer, & Kohlberg, 1976; Holstein, 1973; Hudgins & Prentice, 1973; Jurkovic & Prentice, 1974) found a positive relationship between parents' and children's levels of moral reasoning, they neither provided an explanation for the relationship, nor answered the question how the parents influenced their child's level of moral reasoning. The data in the present study clearly indicate that adults do differ in their styles of reasoning with children and that their styles of reasoning are related to their own level of moral reasoning. Based on the results of the present study it is suggested that Holstein (1973) may have found more conventional level children in homes with principled level parents because principled level adults are more likely to use conventional level reasoning while conventional leveled adults use more preconventional level reasoning. Furthermore, in the studies

involving delinquents and their mothers (Hudgins & Prentice, 1973; Jurkovic & Prentice, 1974), it was reported that the mothers of delinquents were at lower stages of moral development than the mothers of nondelinquents. Therefore, it is likely that the delinquents were at lower stages of moral development than the nondelinquents not simply because their mothers were also at lower stages but because adults at lower stages are more likely to use preconventional moral reasoning than adults at higher levels. However, in these studies as well as the present study, it is not known whether the children's moral development results from the modeling of adults' reasoning or the possible cognitive conflict between the child's level of reasoning and the adults' moral reasoning level. The direction of causality cannot be determined from the present data, however, Hoffman (1975) has presented arguments for why the direction of effects proceeds from the parent to the child rather than vice versa.

Although the present study was limited by the simulated interaction between young adults and children in a laboratory setting, the careful preselection of subjects interviewed under controlled conditions allowed for better comparison of the subject variables under empirical investigation. Based on the findings of the present study, there is a stronger empirical basis for making certain predictions regarding actual parental reasoning styles with children. Future research needs to investigate whether adults respond differently to children at different ages and levels of moral reasoning since Kohlberg (1969) suggested that a cognitive match was necessary for moral development. In addition, whether children's moral development proceeds through the process of modeling adult reasoning (e.g., induction) or through cognitive conflict produced by differences between

the child's level of reasoning and the adult's level of reasoning needs further exploration.

Footnote

1. A copy of the complete list of questions used during the interview as well as a copy of the manual for scoring subjects' responses is available from the author.

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TABLE 1

Relationship Between Subjects' Level of Moral Reasoning and Their Level of Reasoning with Children

Level of Reasoning with Children	Subjects' Level of Reasoning	
	Low Principled	High Principled
Preconventional	26 (15 Males, 11 Females)	4 (2 Males, 2 Females)
Conventional	4 (0 Males, 4 Females)	16 (8 Males, 8 Females)

TABLE 2

Mean Discipline Style Scores by Level of Moral Reasoning for Subjects and Mothers

Discipline Styles	Low Principled				High Principled			
	Males/Mother		Females/Mother		Males/Mother		Females/Mother	
Power Assertion	5.78	5.57	5.21	4.93	3.5	3.6	2.8	2.8
Love Withdrawal	2.43	2.07	2.50	2.07	2.6	2.6	2.8	3.0
Induction	2.78	3.21	3.42	3.71	5.1	4.9	5.4	5.3